PARTNERS AT SCHOOL

A Handbook on How to Involve Indian and Metis Parents in School Activities.

Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation

Saskatchewan Education

Saskatchewan School Trustees Association

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Parents in School Activities.

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ABOUT THE CARTOONS

Sometimes the artist in me steps back and looks at how silly we — parents and teachers — appear, as we attempt to communicate and work together. The cartoons in this book depict some of those situations I have seen and experienced as a student, teacher and parent. Perhaps these cartoons will help us laugh at ourselves before we begin the serious task of making schools a better place for our children.

Sherry Farrell-Racette

Preface

This handbook explores useful methods of facilitating Indian and Metis parents to become more involved in the education of their children and in the provincial school system as a whole. One of its main aims relates to the concern of Indian and Metis parents for reform of the school system. Many of these parents are convinced that their children are not receiving the best education the system can offer and point to the disproportionate number of their children who have become disenchanted with school, failed grades and dropped out as evidence of this. As a result, an increased number of parents have decided to play a more active role in their children's education as well as in the affairs of the school in general in the hope of making an impact to arrest this trend of failure.

Informed and involved parents are valuable players on any educational team. Such parents often furnish teachers and principals with helpful insights into their children's needs, desires and aspirations. These parents often provide the crucial motivational support children need in order to excel in their school and extra-curricular activities. Above all, active parents are generally the most loyal advocates of a school's programs, goals and objectives.

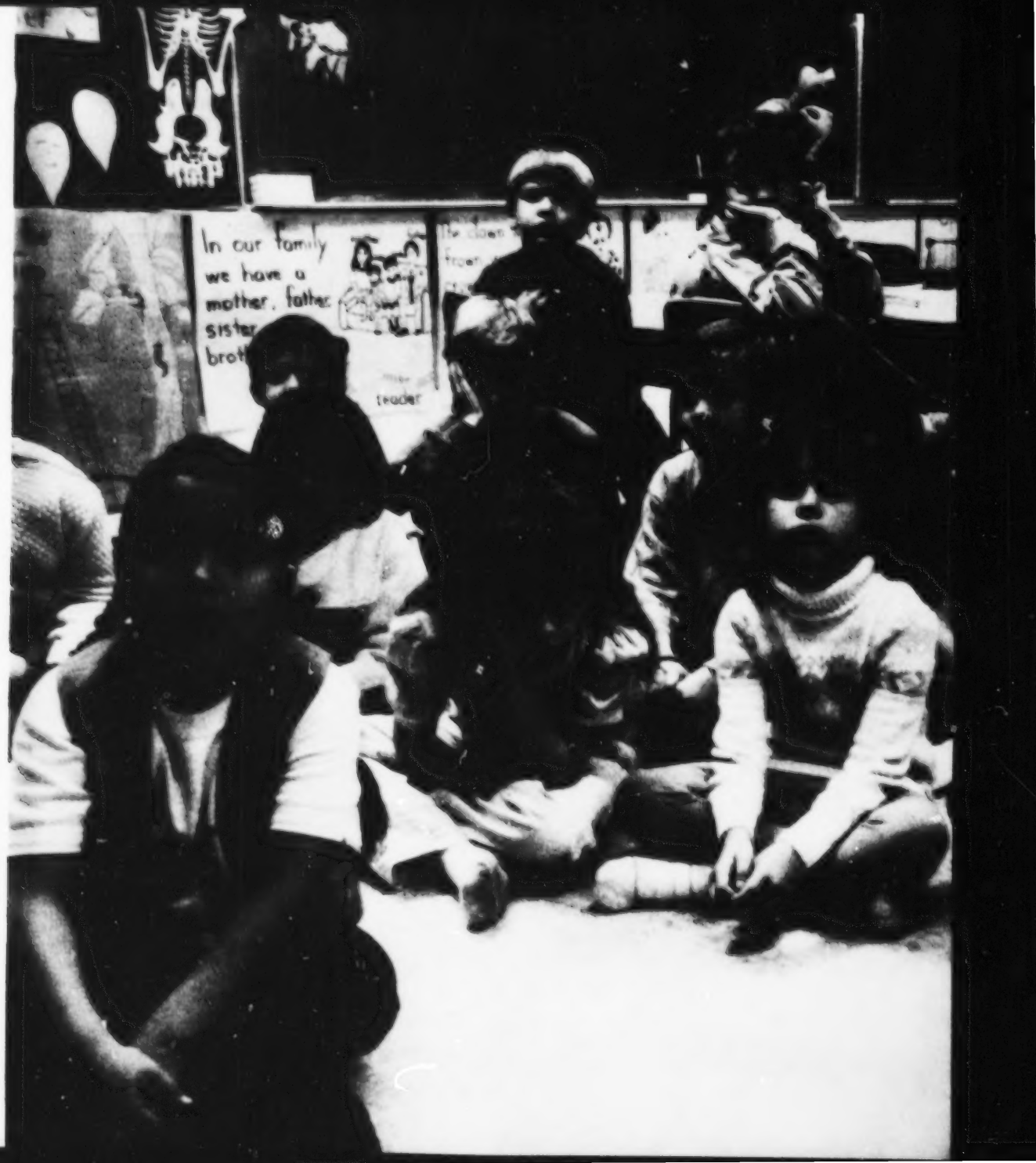
Schools which make a commitment to parental involvement therefore have much to gain from the endeavour. Not the least of which is a greater chance to attain the educational goals of their students and fulfill the expectations of the wider community.

The handbook offers teachers and principals practical suggestions for making the involvement of parents an integral feature of the school's policies, programs and operations. These activities are proposed as a means of helping teachers and principals to respond appropriately to the concerns of parents regarding the kind of education they wish for their children. Principals and teachers will find many of the suggestions in this handbook, although written for the parents of Indian and Metis children, applicable to the wider parental body.

Meaningful parental participation by Indian and Metis people is an undertaking which requires time and effort on the part of parents and school personnel. Because in many cases, parents and teachers have been estranged from each other for so long, mutual trust and respect must first be established, and then remain the foundation of a successful working relationship between both parties. Likewise, programs must be given time to develop before they are evaluated as successful or unsuccessful. Most importantly, there must be sincere commitment both on the part of parents and teachers for the ideas to work. The articles and activities in this handbook introduce parents and teachers to some of the ideas that contribute toward successful parental involvement in schools.

A child's education is vitally affected by the quality and character of the relationship between home and school.

The National Committee
for Citizens in Education



Chapter 1

Race, Education and You[1]

INTRODUCTION

How do your knowledge, opinions, values, beliefs and behaviour affect the education your students receive? This chapter is designed to make you aware of some of your feelings on this subject.

You are going to be looking at yourself and others. Below are a number of exercises which will be of interest to you. The exercises are designed for use as a group activity in a workshop or similar setting.

I AM

Write your name in the blank space provided below. Continue filling in the blanks.

_____
Name

_____
Nationality *(See the glossary for definition)*

_____
Race *(See the glossary for definition)*

_____
Ethnic Group *(See the glossary for definition)*

Draw a picture of yourself in the box below.

THAT'S YOU . . . and we're not going to argue with you, because those are the FACTS about you.

EXERCISE 1

IT HELPS TO KNOW THE FACTS

It doesn't hurt to know a few things. Hard things . . . easy ones. All of us "know" a few things about other people. We may as well know the facts.

Circle the best answer to each question below.

1. Ethnic groups other than English and French represent ___ % of Saskatchewan's population.
   A. 15%
   B. 40%
   C. 60%

2. Approximately how many Treaty Indians live in Saskatchewan?
   A. 15,000
   B. 30,000
   C. 40,000

3. The number of Treaty Indian students in Saskatchewan has doubled in the last ten years.
   A. True
   B. False

4. There are more people of German descent in Saskatchewan than of Ukrainian descent.
   A. True
   B. False

5. As a rule, Hutterites do not take Family Allowance Payments, Old Age Pensions, or similar benefits even though they pay income tax and are legally entitled to these benefits.
   A. True
   B. False

6. How many Indian bands are there in the province of Saskatchewan?
   A. 103
   B. 69
   C. 24
   D. 7

7. In Saskatchewan, the only Treaty money that an Indian receives is $5 a year.
   A. True
   B. False

8. In Saskatchewan, provided that there is appropriate community approval, any language may be used as the language of instruction in schools.
   A. True
   B. False

A little knowledge never hurts (though it may be a dangerous thing sometimes). Score 5 for each right answer and 0 for each wrong one. Sorry, but there are no marks in between. It is either right or wrong because those are the FACTS.

Answers

1. C. 60%
2. C. 40,000
3. A. True
4. A. True
5. A. True
6. B. 69
7. A. True
8. A. True

EXERCISE 2

DEBUNKING THE MYTHS

You are the Public Relations Officer of an organization that represents one of the following groups:

(a) New Canadians
(b) Native Women
(c) The Handicapped
(d) Single Parents

Make a list of two or three "myths" and "facts" about that group to which you consider principals, teachers and school trustees need to give urgent attention.

EXERCISE 3

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION?[3]

Everyone has an opinion and we generally don't mind sharing opinions with each other.

Read each opinion carefully and come to a majority decision in your group. The opinions are statements that we have heard from time to time. Mark each statement in the right margin according to whether the majority of the group agrees or disagrees with it. Remember, this is a group exercise.

You can only reach a majority decision by sharing your opinions. The best way to do that is to talk to each other.

The best answer is your opinion, but it didn't hurt to hear someone else's.

OPINIONS	Agree	Disagree
1. The trouble with the school system is that it does not respect the needs of non-White Canadians.	☐	☐
2. The issue of racism is irrelevant in the school at which I teach.	☐	☐
3. If we maintain our ethnic/ cultural differences, we permit hostility to develop between various ethnic/ cultural groups.	☐	☐
4. Discussion of racism among students and teachers only serves to heighten racial tension in schools.	☐	☐
5. It is necessary for Indian people to change many of their habits in order to get along with other Canadians.	☐	☐
6. It is necessary for White people to change many of their habits in order to get along with Indian people.	☐	☐
7. If teachers treated every pupil "as an individual," the issue of racism would not rear its ugly head in schools.	☐	☐
8. Our school board should adopt a stronger anti-racist policy with respect to curriculum materials.	☐	☐

Your opinion means you may have some . . . VALUES.

EXERCISE 4

VALUE JUDGMENTS[4]

We've all heard the expression — "That's a value judgment." It's usually said in the heat of a debate, and it means that one person has decided that his values are worth more than anyone else's. The other person of course, feels that his values are just as good as the first person's.

Your group is a values selection committee. You have been given full authority to determine the values of your society. Below are pairs of hypothetical values. Your group should reach a majority decision on which of the values in each pair you will adopt for your society.

You must choose between the value pairs. ***You must accept one, but not the other.***

SET A

1. — Men and women are not of equal status. A woman is responsible for the family and home. She must perform all household duties, look after the children and be a good wife to her husband. The ultimate goal in life for most women is to be a good wife and mother.
2. — We believe that old people have a great deal to contribute to their families and communities. Therefore, we prefer that they stay in the family's home as long as possible. They can teach the young the important customs and traditions of their culture. Old people are respected and have a lot to say in family decisions.
3. — You should strive for employment. It is most important to remain independent and provide for your family.

SET B

1. — Men and women are said to be of equal status, but men generally have higher status. If hardships are encountered, men and women should try to share their difficulties together. It is quite acceptable for women to be active in business and politics.
2. — Old people receive an old age pension which allows them to remain independent of their children or their families. They usually live in old folks' homes where they can be with people their own age. As a result, the Government, rather than their families, takes care of them.
3. — You should strive for any employment, but there are some jobs you would likely find unattractive or unacceptable. If that is the case, you should remain on unemployment insurance until a better job comes along.

The value statements in Set A are predominant values of some non-Western societies. The value statements in Set B are predominant values of Western society.

No doubt there were some non-Western values that the group accepted, and some that were eliminated. The same may also be true for Western values.

Score your decisions on the chart below.

	Retained	**Eliminated**
Non-Western values	_____	_____
Western values	_____	_____

If the group decided that more Western values were to be retained than non-Western values, it should not be surprising that Western values continue to dominate our society. As educators, we transmit our own values and opinions (as well as facts) to our students. What we do and say is important — just as important, if not more so, than what our teaching materials say.

What we do and say is our . . . BEHAVIOUR.

EXERCISE 5

BEHAVIOURS[5]

Below, three problems are described. Each demands a solution. Arrive at a group consensus on each of the problems.

1. Five children of Pakistani cultural heritage have been placed in your classroom. They have little or no knowledge of English. You do the best you can by spending as much time with them as you can afford. However, you begin to receive complaints from the parents of the other students in your class. The parents are alarmed at how poorly their children are doing in comparison to the previous year. What do you do?

2. You notice that there seems to be a lot of name calling going on between Indian students and White students on the playground. On two occasions, you have learned of Indian children being beaten up by White children after school. You mention this to the Principal, but he dismisses it with a "Boys will be boys" reply. What do you do?

3. One of your fellow teachers appears to be pretty bigoted. He tells a lot of ethnic jokes in the staffroom. He never has a good word to say about Indian students. In fact, he takes delight in telling you how they will never make it through his class. In all other aspects, however, he is an excellent teacher. What approach would you use to help the teacher see the errors of his ways?

In this chapter, we looked at a few FACTS, OPINIONS, VALUES, and BEHAVIOURS. In the process, we looked at ourselves.

We do not know of a formula that will solve teachers' problems about questions of race.

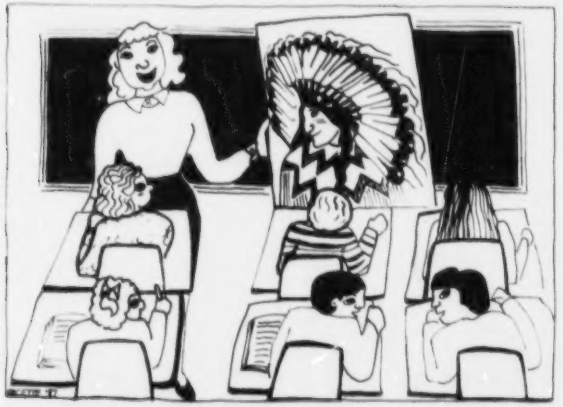
We do know that with a bit of insight into your own behaviour and beliefs that you will be able to handle **some** of the problems that you will come across when dealing with students and parents of all racial backgrounds.

RACISM: WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE IN SCHOOLS?[6]

The eradication of racism becomes the task of every teacher.

Racism exists in the schools because racism exists in the society. The eradication of racism becomes the task of every teacher. It affects teachers personally and professionally. In short, racism can actually prevent teachers from teaching well, for it can impair relationships with students, limit the knowledge presented and explored, and eventually limit children's opportunities in life. In practice, racism has something to do with all of the following:

- Some teachers having low expectations of students from racial minority backgrounds.
- Teachers teaching to those low expectations and students remaining unchallenged and becoming more disabled learners each year.
- Students accepting these limited visions of themselves as problem children.
- Large groups of students being streamed in one particular subject area because they seem good at it, but denied the opportunity to grow and develop in other important areas.
- Students' experiences not seriously taken up in classes, but used as show and tell, and forgotten or omitted from the main curriculum.



... BUT I THOUGHT WE WERE INDIANS!

For example, it is:

- Japanese Canadian students' view of wartime experience not matching the "objective" Canadian vision and the history teacher describing it as "nonsense"... history always told from the view of the conqueror.
- Native Canadian children seeing themselves depicted as "a problem."
- Native Canadian children taught in English with no attention paid to home languages.
- A Black Canadian child colouring her reading book in brown crayon because no one in the book looks like her.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Below are some questions you may wish to answer through discussion with your colleagues at school.

1. How do I feel about discussing the issue of racism? Are there situations in which discussions of race have made me feel uncomfortable? What has been the source of my discomfort?
2. How far can I control myself and the situation if students express views which differ sharply from mine?
3. What do I say if racist comments are directed at me?
4. How will I deal with controversial topics arousing negative reactions?
5. Examine the cartoon on this page and those on pages 11, 14, 22, 34, and 35. Share with your colleagues the humor, if any, you find in the drawings. What other messages, if any, do the cartoons convey?

. . . No matter how motivated parents are, what determines the strength and quality of parent involvement in a school is the attitude and behaviour of the school staff.

National Committee for
Citizens in Education

Chapter 2

Parental Involvement . . . Some Questions and Answers

INTRODUCTION

Now that you are aware of some of the facts and opinions about yourself, school and education, it is time to take a look at where Indian and Metis parents fit into the picture. This chapter answers some of the questions teachers and principals most frequently ask about working closely with parents, generally, and Indian and Metis parents, in particular. The exercises are designed to be used as group activities at staff meetings, professional development workshops, and meetings of parents.

Leaders of these meetings may suggest further uses of the activities to go along with those in each exercise. In this manner, we hope you will find answers to some of the other questions you may have that this chapter does not address.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

We would like your opinions on the topic of parental involvement in the school, with specific reference to Indian and Metis parents. Answer the questions below. At the end of the exercise, count how many of the other members in the group share your opinions.

1. Should parental involvement in school be restricted to duties related to social activities? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Should you be expected to visit a parent's home to discuss school-related problems affecting a student in your class? ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. Is it true that much of what Indian and Metis students are able to do depends on what the parents expect of them? ☐ Yes ☐ No
4. Would the presence of a parent in your classroom intimidate you, make you feel nervous or insecure? ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Parental involvement is only effective when there is a consensus of opinion among members of the community regarding schooling? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Now, add up the group's response. Discuss the score in terms of your own opinion.

EXERCISE 1

WHAT AM I DOING?

Here are some questions you should ask yourself to determine your level of contact with the parents of your students.

1. Do you phone or even visit your students' homes early in the year to introduce yourself and set the stage for a personal relationship? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Do you phone or write a note home when a student does something good or achieves something positive? ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. Do you invite parents to visit classes to gain first-hand knowledge on what is happening? ☐ Yes ☐ No
4. Do the principal and teachers invite parents to drop in for coffee during the year to talk about school programs? ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Do parents receive a warm reception when they enter the school or are they ignored and left to find their own way around? ☐ Yes ☐ No
6. Do Indian and Metis parents perceive that they are welcome when they visit the school? ☐ Yes ☐ No
7. Do you inform parents of the curriculum and explain to them the purpose of special events? ☐ Yes ☐ No
8. Are you sensitive to the various family arrangements that exist within the families of the children you teach? ☐ Yes ☐ No
9. Have you evaluated the effectiveness of your communication with Indian and Metis parents? ☐ Yes ☐ No

IT WORKS! IT REALLY WORKS!

Growth and learning in children can only be understood in relation to the various environments in which the child is living.

National Council for Special Education

EXERCISE 2

The fully informed parent is much less likely to be discontented or confused and much more likely to provide support for the teacher's effort.

Robert Stamp

WILL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AFFECT THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION?[1]

Below are some views on the topic of parental involvement upon which you may reflect.

Involvement of Indian and Metis parents, guardians or grandparents in the schools cannot be considered as an end in itself, but as a means to an end — improved education for the children. Any case for parental participation must stand or fall on its potential for improving or harming the educational process.

When children enter school at age four or five or six, the home environment has already exerted a formidable influence on them. Thereafter, neither the home nor the school can operate in a vacuum — they are inextricably linked by the child for whom they bear responsibility.

Schools often forget that parents are the primary educators and that they know the strengths and weaknesses of their individual children. Good schools are supposedly striving for an awareness of the individual. Yet instead of being delighted with this parent knowledge and seizing it as a meaningful resource, some school people turn their backs on it, afraid of complications and detail. The personal insights of parents may complicate routine, but will still be valuable and schools could and should make full use of them.

Teachers are more apt to see children for short periods of time: a class once a day for forty minutes, a term from September to December, a school year from September to June. But the parent is with the child through the whole sweep of his/her growth. Continuous contact breeds perspective, a tolerant touch, a gentleness that could improve many schools. Parents have still another insight into child development — an awareness that children are whole. Much educational practice segments children: this is Grade Seven; this is reading time; this is the top ability group. Closer relationships with parents could acquaint school people more intimately with the whole child.

Working with parents, then, is an essential part of working with children. Teachers can increase their effectiveness in the classroom if they reinforce their work with a child by interacting with the child's parents. Children are influenced greatly by their teachers, but they are influenced most by their parents. To capitalize on parental influence as an aid to teaching a child is imperative.

If you accept these principles of parental involvement in general, it should be easy to accept the value of involvement by Indian and Metis people.

EXERCISE 3

WHAT IS YOUR SCHOOL DOING ABOUT PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT?[2]

Discuss in your group the provisions your school makes to foster active parental participation. Use the following questions as a guide in your discussion:

1. **OPTIONS:**

a) Does your school have an active Parent Teachers or Home and School Association, Advisory Committee or Council, Board of Trustees, or other similar organization?
b) Is the racial composition of such groups reflective of the racial composition of the student population?
c) Does the school solicit support for these organizations from parents of all racial and social classes?
d) What other avenues exist for parent/school cooperation?

2. **SUPPORT:**

a) Are the members of staff keen supporters of parental involvement?
b) Does the school offer practical assistance, such as secretarial service or meeting facilities to enable the operation of parent committees?
c) Are students made aware of the contributions parents can make/are making to the school?

3. **OPENNESS:**

a) Is there a legitimate forum through which parents can express their opinions on such matters as curriculum and instruction?
b) Is there an honest exchange of ideas between parents and teachers on a broad range of school-related topics?
c) Are parents informed of their rights and responsibilities pertaining to the schooling of their children?

EXERCISE 4

. . . BUT HOW DO WE GET PARENTS INVOLVED?[3]

Read the following article. Make a list of ten ideas your school might adopt to get more Indian and Metis parants involved in school life.

Many schools report apathy on the part of parents, generally, and Indian and Metis parents, particularly, when it comes to involvement in school. But, can it be possible that all or most of these parents don't care about improved education? That's highly unlikely. There is always a high degree of parent involvement under the following conditions:

VARIETY OF OPTIONS: The interests of Indian and Metis parents, like those of all other parents, are varied. So, too, is their availability. Therefore, consider the specific ways in which parents, community members, can be helpers, resource people, consultants. Engage a group of parents and other community people in arriving at options that might be viable in the particular setting.

SCHOOL SUPPORT: The principal is usually the key. Principal support and interest can energize the same conscious and latent feelings among many teachers. Parents cannot be involved effectively, obviously, if there is no one at school who really wants to be involved with them.

OPENNESS/HONESTY: People working with each other on school development have a need to know the real agenda. At times, some educators have hidden motives for working with parents, setting up unnecessary barriers because they are wary of what might be recommended. Sometimes particular parents and certain community people have personal or political axes to grind as they meet with educators. The air needs to be cleared early in the process so that all agendas are out in the open if effective school improvement is desired.

EXERCISE 5

WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT?[4]

Read the following article and discuss the questions:

Experience has shown that there are five factors that contribute to the success of parental involvement in schools and particularly in those schools which Indian and Metis students attend.

1. Explore with parents what they want schools to accomplish. You are likely to discover that parents and school people make natural partners because they share a common goal: providing quality educational opportunities for children.

2. Devise opportunities for parents to get involved that they see as practical and meaningful. Successful experiences have great holding power.

3. Keep reaching out to parents with warmth, sensitivity, and sincerity. Seek to eliminate barriers of race, religion or economic condition and stereotyped preconceptions are likely to disappear.

Hello Mrs. Wapoose! Are you lovely ladies planning a bake sale?
We're organizing an assessment of the racial attitudes of staff and students
There's a whole section on paternalism!
No

4. Develop on ongoing training program in which parents and staff are both teachers and learners. The quality of human relationships in teaching and learning experiences is of paramount importance because rules, regulations and techniques by themselves rarely work to change behaviour at deeper levels.

5. Acknowledge that sharing power with parents is not abdication of one's professional leadership role. On the contrary, it provides an opportunity to understand parents' interests and goals and to learn ways to help achieve them.

   Moreover, well-informed parents contribute to wiser decisions. They also come to respect the views of educators and value their expertise in matters where it counts.

The essence of success in working with parents — no matter where they live or what their circumstances — is a spirit of cooperation with the shared purpose of meeting children's needs.

The essence of success in working with parents . . . is a spirit of cooperation with the shared purpose of meeting children's needs.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Discuss any hesitations that you, as a teacher or principal, have with regard to the involvement of Indian and Metis parents in the school.

2. What do you feel are the rights of teachers with regard to classroom visits from parents? What are the parents' rights?

3. What effect, if any, does the diversity of student family background have on the parental involvement program of your school?

4. What can your school do to increase the involvement of parents of all racial backgrounds in the life of the school?

EXERCISE 6

PLANNING FOR ACTION

Convene a series of meetings of Indian and Metis parents. Use one or more of the following questions as the main topic of discussion of each meeting.

Questions:

1. What would you like to see your child or children accomplish at school during the next year?
2. What are the most meaningful options available to parents for involvement in the school?
3. What knowledge about parents do teachers need; likewise, what knowledge about schools do parents need in order that both groups may work together more effectively? How can your group respond to these needs?
4. What can school personnel do to help involve parents in education when the parents' work schedules, transportation problems, or lack of babysitting services threatens to prevent them from participating?
5. How can teachers minimize the problems which often occur when parents' language and cultural backgrounds differ from their own?
6. What are some common causes of value conflicts between teachers and parents? What compromises might be possible in each case?
7. What can teachers do when a parent's values conflict with those of the teacher or the school, and compromise is not possible? Give examples or role-play situations in which this might be the case.
8. What are some common attitudinal problems of parents? How did these attitudes develop?
9. What attitudinal problems of teachers may inhibit parent involvement? How can teachers eliminate these attitudinal barriers among themselves?

EXERCISE 7

CHECKLIST FOR SUCCESSFUL PARENT INTERVIEWS[5]

Give each member of your staff a copy of the checklist below. Discuss how this checklist may serve each teacher's needs. Plan to use the checklist at the next parent interviews. Answer "Yes" or "No" to each question below.

PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW:

( ) Does the meeting time allow working parents to attend?

( ) Is the meeting in conflict with religious or cultural events in the community?

( ) Have I invited the parent to send a representative, such as an older child, aunt, uncle or grandparent, if the parent is unable to attend the interview?

( ) Have I telephoned those people for whom it would be more common to convey messages orally?

( ) Have I invited translators and cultural interpreters?*

( ) Have I placed signs in appropriate languages, or appointed guides to escort parents to my room?

( ) Have I learned the correct last name and pronunciation of the parent's name?

( ) Do I have several examples of the student's work on hand?

AT THE INTERVIEW:

( ) How specific and candid am I in giving a parent information about his/her child's performance?

( ) Do I believe in the student's ability to learn?

( ) Am I conveying that confidence to the parent?

( ) How clear am I at explaining what I am attempting to do in class?

( ) Am I using the opportunity to learn about the parent's hopes for his/her child?

( ) Am I using parent's comments to rethink my teaching strategies?

( ) Am I giving the parent a chance to ask questions?

( ) Am I listening? Am I paraphrasing and giving back to the parent my understanding of what is being said?

( ) Am I allowing time for the parent whose mother tongue is not English, or who speaks a variety of English different from mine, to convey his/her meaning?

( ) Am I noting the parent's non-verbal cues?

( ) Am I using the opportunity to learn from the parent about the strategies which work well with the student in the area of work habits and conduct?

( ) Am I using the opportunity to discover ways in which the parent can contribute to the student's learning and the life of the school?

( ) Am I open to the fact that the parents' economic/social reality may make it impossible for them to participate in school life in the traditional ways?

( ) Am I using the occasion to provide a parent with more information about the school and about their rights as parents in order to empower them to participate significantly in the life of the school?

( ) Am I inviting the parent to express his/her expectations of the school?

( ) Am I inviting the parent to express dissatisfactions and explore conflicts which he/she has experienced with the school?

( ) Am I using the opportunity to explain the school's race relations policy to parents from all cultural and racial backgrounds?

* — *"Cultural interpreters" are people who are familiar with the official and unofficial cultures of the school and home. Cultures here include the meanings, values, and practices that are common not only to the ethnic group from which the parent comes but also to their social class.*

EXERCISE 8

THAT'S ALL VERY WELL . . . BUT . . .[6]

Having gone through the checklist in Exercise 7, you might discuss the ideas as all very well for someone who does not face the constraints which many teachers experience. In order to help you develop solutions, invite the group to identify the problems and outline some possible approaches to overcoming these.

Discussion might look something like this:

Possible Constraints	Possible Approaches
1. Too many parents to process in one day.	1. Rescheduling over a few days.
2. Time that working parents can come is inconvenient for me.	2. Ask the principal to provide compensatory time to allow you to work at an unusual hour.
3. No access to translator.	3. Approach a cultural group and try to secure a small honorarium from the school budget. Ensure that translators are knowledgeable about dialects and familiar with the education system.
4. Unable to avoid discouraging parents when giving information about their children's performance.	4. Identify features of the student's work which are positive. Outline some of the skills and knowledge a student is expected to have in order to be functioning at the relevant grade level.
5. Some parents won't come no matter what we do.	5. Try taking the interviews to parents. One Saskatchewan school conducts interviews at the Community Centre to encourage parent attendance. The parents, in turn, have organized parties and cultural events for the teachers.

Such discussions can not only generate ideas for re-allocating existing resources and time, but may identify future demands which teachers, principals, and parents must make to ensure real dialogue between home and school. Looking squarely at constraints is often the first step to ensuring that the education system is truly serious about an issue to which it has publicly professed commitment.

PRINCIPAL LISTENS — PARENTS TALK[7]

The following activities are descriptions of projects your school may try in order to increase the present level of parental participation in the school:

OBJECTIVES:
To bring together for informal discussions, parents and the principal.

To open up parent needs and concerns to be solved **before** they turn into crises and problems.

To discuss school-wide and grade level issues, not personal situations.

MATERIALS: None.

PERSONNEL:
Principal/school/resource staff as needed/ parents.

BUDGET: No additional money needed.

TIME: Two mornings per month.

STRATEGY:
Announce **Open Door** and open house policy of principal to listen to all and any parents on any school-related subject two Friday mornings per month throughout the school year.

Use school newsletters and posters for initial announcement and phone calls as weekly reminders. Provide coffee/refreshments to set the tone for an informal atmosphere.

These meetings may take place in one or more of the following locations: the school gym, the band office, the community centre or in a parent's home. Use topics related to parents' concerns and have participants plan the agenda each week. If specialists are needed to answer some questions, they can be called in for future meetings.

EVALUATION:
Count the people who come. Use a suggestion or idea box to provide topics, as needed, for future meetings.

60-SECOND TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS[8]

OBJECTIVES:
To assist parents in understanding learning objectives.

To improve communication between students, parents, and teachers.

BUDGET MATERIAL:
Telephone, progress report form, envelopes.

PERSONNEL:
Teacher.

TIME:
Twenty minutes a night, five nights in one week.

STRATEGY:
Set up calling schedule: five parents per night for one week. Activity may be done each marking period or once a year. The initial phone call is to introduce the teacher. Example: "Hello, I'm . . . , Janie's teacher. I'm calling to say Janie did well in . . . For the next two weeks we'll be studying . . . in . . . " Suggest ways parents might assist the student. Invite parents to call you if they have any questions. Tell parents you would like to call at least once each marking period. Those not reached by phone should receive written notices or personal visits.

EVALUATION:
Positive feedback from parents and students. Improved self-image and better defined goals for the individual student.

FOLLOW-UP:
Request evaluation and suggestions from pupils and their parents at end of semester.

A FINAL WORD

A team is a number of people who work together, but you know which one is playing left field and which one is pitching.

National School Volunteer Program Booklet

HOW DO I WORK WITH TEACHER AIDES?[9]

One option for parental involvement in schools is to encourage service as Teacher Aides, either paid or voluntary.

The question then arises . . . How do I work with Teacher Aides?

It is essential to define the role of the Teacher Aide and quickly establish what they can and cannot do. In the best programs, such definitions are worked out jointly with the professional educators and then buttressed in orientation sessions for the Aides.

It is also clear that the role changes. Not only do Teacher Aides grow on the job, but the natural fears of the professionals lessen as the effectiveness of the Teacher Aide increases.

Here are four basic aims of a Teacher Aide program:

1. Relieve teachers of non-teaching duties;
2. Provide individual attention and assistance that the classroom teacher is not able to supply to children who are not performing well in a group situation;
3. Tap the human resources of the community for the enrichment of the school program; and
4. Develop a greater citizen understanding of the problems facing the schools, enlist their assistance in maintaining financial support, and involve them in the total effort to improve public education.

In the first three, each has an operative word: "non-professional," "assistance," and "enrichment." Those three words touch on the essence of what the volunteer is and does.

NOT A TEACHER

A Teacher Aide should always work under the direction and supervision of a teacher or other member of the school staff. A Teacher Aide is never considered a substitute for a member of the school staff. A volunteer is never expected to perform professional services. The teacher is always responsible for the curriculum and student instruction.

Parents must make room in their hearts and then in their schedule for their children. No poor parent is too poor to do this, and no middle-class parent is too busy.

Rev. Jesse Jackson

Chapter 3

When Parents Become Involved . . .

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on some of the questions and issues of concern to many Indian and Metis parents when they participate in the affairs of their children's schooling. The exercises in this chapter will help you (a) answer parents' questions, (b) resolve parents' complaints, and (c) assist parents in utilizing their own resources to make the most of the school system.

If some of the topics in this chapter seem to you rudimentary, odd, or even threatening, don't be alarmed. Remember: these issues are intrinsic to the interest of parents. The topics may or may not be ones with which you are normally preoccupied. The information, however, should help to strengthen the degree of trust between teachers/principals and parents.

WHO'S WHO AT SCHOOL[1]

When parents have a complaint, concern or compliment about school, they need to catch the ear of the correct person if their voice is to be effective. Here is a brief description of who is who in the school system.

Use this description as a guide in directing parents to whom they should go when they have something to say about school.

The Teacher

The teacher is responsible for helping the children in the class learn the information he or she is responsible for teaching. For some teachers that will be all subjects; for others, just one subject.

When you have a problem about what your child is doing in class, how your child is learning, or how well your child is improving, you should tell the teacher about the problem first.

The Principal and Vice Principal

The principal and vice principal are responsible for school administration. A principal's job includes school discipline, teacher supervision, helping parents and teachers with problems and meeting with the Home and School Association, director of education, and other school administrators.

The principal is there to help you with any problem related to the school as a whole.

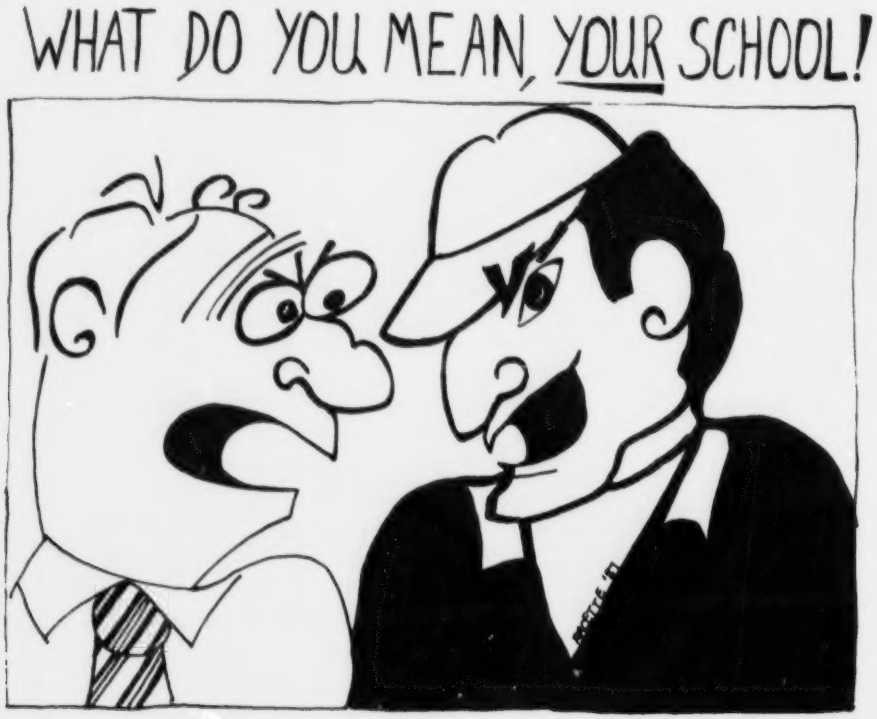
The Director of Education

The director of education and his or her assistants are responsible for the way all of the schools in the division function. They handle the calendar for the school year, the budget for the school division, the program in each school, and hiring and supervision of teachers.

Go directly to the director of education if you have a concern or praise that relates to the school division as a whole.

The Board of Trustees and Board of Education

In rural school divisions, each school has an elected Board of Trustees. This board is often involved in decision-making related to such matters as teacher hiring, program development and the maintenance and use of the school building. The Board of Trustees is often called a "local board." Parents should make sure the Board of Trustees is familiar with their concerns.



Final decisions about how the schools in a community function are made by the Board of Education. Members of the board are elected by the community to decide on educational policies for the school. They must, therefore, answer to those who elect them for what they do.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Each class teacher should fill in the names of the people who hold the following titles in their school division. Arrange to have this list sent to all parents of your students accompanied by a brief word of greeting from you.

Your name:

_____

The Principal of your school:

_____

The Director of the school division:

_____

_____

Members of the Board of Trustees or Board of Education:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

EXERCISE 1

A PARENTAL ASSESSMENT OF SCHOOL[2]

Discuss the information contained in the following exercise at your next staff meeting. Appoint a group of teachers to meet with parents to present these suggestions for conducting a parental assessment of your school.

Teachers and principals should encourage parents to ask questions about their school. Is the school responsive to the needs and interests of their children? Will their children complete their high school program? Will the program they are following allow them access to further educational opportunities?

The process of assessment can become a most valuable exercise if it provides answers that will shape present and future educational programs of a school. The co-operation of both groups, however, is essential if the assessment process is to be successful.

Doing the Assessment

One possible structure for an assessment effort is to have a subcommittee of a parent group responsible to a leadership committee or executive body. The steps below will help the parent committee to devise its own method to find answers to some of the questions they may raise about their children's school. Advise the parent committee to:

1. Create a subcommittee to oversee the assessment procedure. This subcommittee may comprise four or five parents, a teacher and the principal.
2. Determine the purpose of the assessment. What would the group like to know from the data to be collected? What likely action does the group perceive taking at the end of the exercise?
3. Determine the areas to be assessed. For example, will it be teacher attitudes, instructional material or school discipline?
4. Determine the specific objectives of the assessment. They should be meaningful and measureable. Do the parents wish to sample community reaction to the core curriculum for example? Or do they wish to determine whether students are getting better grades since the new English curriculum was introduced?
5. Develop methods of collecting the information. One or more of the following methods may be useful:
   a) Observation. A team may visit the school to record its observation of what is going on in the classrooms and throughout the school.
   b) Documentation. Collect evidence that illustrates cause and effect relationships. For example, see how various textbooks and texts being used promote cultural fairness.
   c) Surveys. Take samplings of various groups' attitudes toward the school, teachers, students, parents and the curriculum.
6. Compile the data. Be sure the data contain the information you set out to collect in the first place.
7. Analyze the data to determine the effectiveness of your school's program, curriculum or whatever area you are assessing.
8. Arrange the results in a meaningful format, outlining specific findings and recommendations. Disseminate the report.
9. Discuss the steps to be taken to act on the findings and recommendations. This step is perhaps the most crucial as it involves careful collaborative planning with whatever bodies are affected.

Remind parents that as individuals or in a group, they can voice opinions at school board meetings or make use of the local media — newspapers, television, radio — to bring out their concerns and commendations about education quality.

The ultimate goal, which everyone should keep in mind, is improved quality education that will benefit all children, not only in school, but throughout their lives.

EXERCISE 2

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A GOOD SCHOOL[3]

There are six crucial areas parents need to explore that will give an indication of the quality of a school. Discuss these indicators with parents at the next parent teacher meeting and encourage parents to apply this yardstick to your school.

Some crucial areas to investigate	**Some Positive Indication**
1. Does your school have a set of goals and objectives?	The goals and objectives are clearly stated, known, understood, and communicated by the school staff.
2. Does your school offer a variety of learning experiences?	Regimentation becomes secondary to exciting learning activities. Motivation is the basis for control.
3. Does your school respect its students?	Each student is respected as an individual having rights. This respect is evident in the way all of its students are treated, not just some of them. There is a good relationship between student and teacher, parent and teacher, and between the school and the community it serves.
4. Does your school encourage positive feelings among students?	Teachers are very aware of their effect on a child's behaviour.
5. Do your school's teachers and students have a positive attitude toward school?	Teachers talk freely with administrators and parents. Vandalism is almost non-existent. Students are eager to learn. There is a good working relationship between the school and the community it serves.
6. Does your school encourage interaction between the parents and the staff?	Most school information and data is available to parents. Parent volunteers are regarded as an asset and are recruited and welcomed. Parents and teachers have easy access to teachers and to school officials. Parents are encouraged to become involved in the decision making process and to participate in the governance of the school. There is some degree of partnership or delegated power between the administration and the parents.

EXERCISE 3

VISITING THE SCHOOL[4]

Send the following information to parents in your next news bulletin. Follow up with an explanation of each point at the next meeting of the parent body.

There are occasions when parents may need to visit their child's school. They don't always have to wait for an invitation. Any of the following circumstances may indicate the need for them to initiate a visit to their child's school.

Advise parents of the procedure at your school for making such a visit.

— Your child tells you he or she is having learning or social problems.

— Your child says nothing about classwork or teachers.

— Your child goes to a new school or has a new teacher.

— A teacher tells you your child is having learning or behaviour problems.

— A teacher or your child describes a project you'd like to learn about.

— You prepare for or follow-up a parent teacher conference.

— You question the appropriateness of your child's placement in a regular or special classroom.

EXERCISE 4

EFFECTIVE MEETINGS[5]

Discuss the following points with the executive of your parent organization.

At times it is necessary for parents to organize to have an effect. Meetings are important to every group or organization. These can be productive and help build a strong group, or they can be a waste of time. There are a number of things parents can do to make their meetings more effective.

In the Planning Stage:

— Select a convenient time and meeting place.

— Make it clear to people why it is important for them to come. A personal contact that makes the meeting sound interesting and important is the most successful way of getting people to attend.

— Develop an agenda carefully with a time schedule.

At the Meeting:

Many groups die because their meetings are dull. To combat boredom:

— Follow the agenda and time schedule so that the meeting does not drag on.

— Leave time in the agenda for new ideas.

— Involve as many people as possible in the discussion.

— Don't shy away from problems or disagreements. Share them and allow time for people to vent their feelings.

— Provide coffee and refreshments to help make people feel welcome and give them an easy way to socialize.

Ending the Meeting:

— Don't let the meeting fizzle out!

— End every meeting with a decision.

— Review tasks and make sure that people agree on what is to be done before the next meeting.

WE'RE GLAD YOU'RE HERE[6]

The following activities are descriptions of projects your school may try in order to increase the present level of parental participation in the school.

OBJECTIVE:
To provide new parents with information about their school and community.

MATERIALS:
Packet containing latest information about school.

PERSONNEL:
School secretary and Home and School Association.

BUDGET:
No extra monies — just local use of telephone.

STRATEGY:
Prepare a packet of basic information about the school and local community which may include: school handbook, student newspaper, Home and School Association or PTA Newsletter, general information about the community, i.e., material from banks, realtors, etc., include a PTA Survey Sheet which ascertains a willingness to:

- Serve on committees and/or as volunteers;
- Be included (with phone number) in school directory;
- Be contacted by PTA member.

Positive responses by new parents are followed up by a PTA representative who calls on parents at home, takes them on a tour of community and accompanies them to the first PTA meeting.

EVALUATION:
Positive response of participants and numbers of new parents working in school program.

FOLLOW-UP:
Parent is the guest of the PTA at lunch followed by a tour of the school building and grounds.

PRINCIPAL'S HOT-LINE[7]

OBJECTIVE:
To provide parents with a direct communication line to discuss any subject relating to school.

MATERIALS: Telephone.

PERSONNEL: Principal's time.

TIME: One hour each week.

STRATEGY:
Through school newsletters invite parents to use a designated hour each week to communicate on any issue. The principal allots this time to tune in to the community's thinking. Parents are encouraged to call about both positive and negative issues. Parents are requested to limit calls to no more than five minutes, so that a number of parents can use this Hot Line. Arrange an appointment to see parents who require more than five minutes to discuss their ideas.

In communities where few parents have telephones, the principal may make arrangements for parents to use the telephone at the band office or community centre to voice their opinions.

EVALUATION: Count the responses.

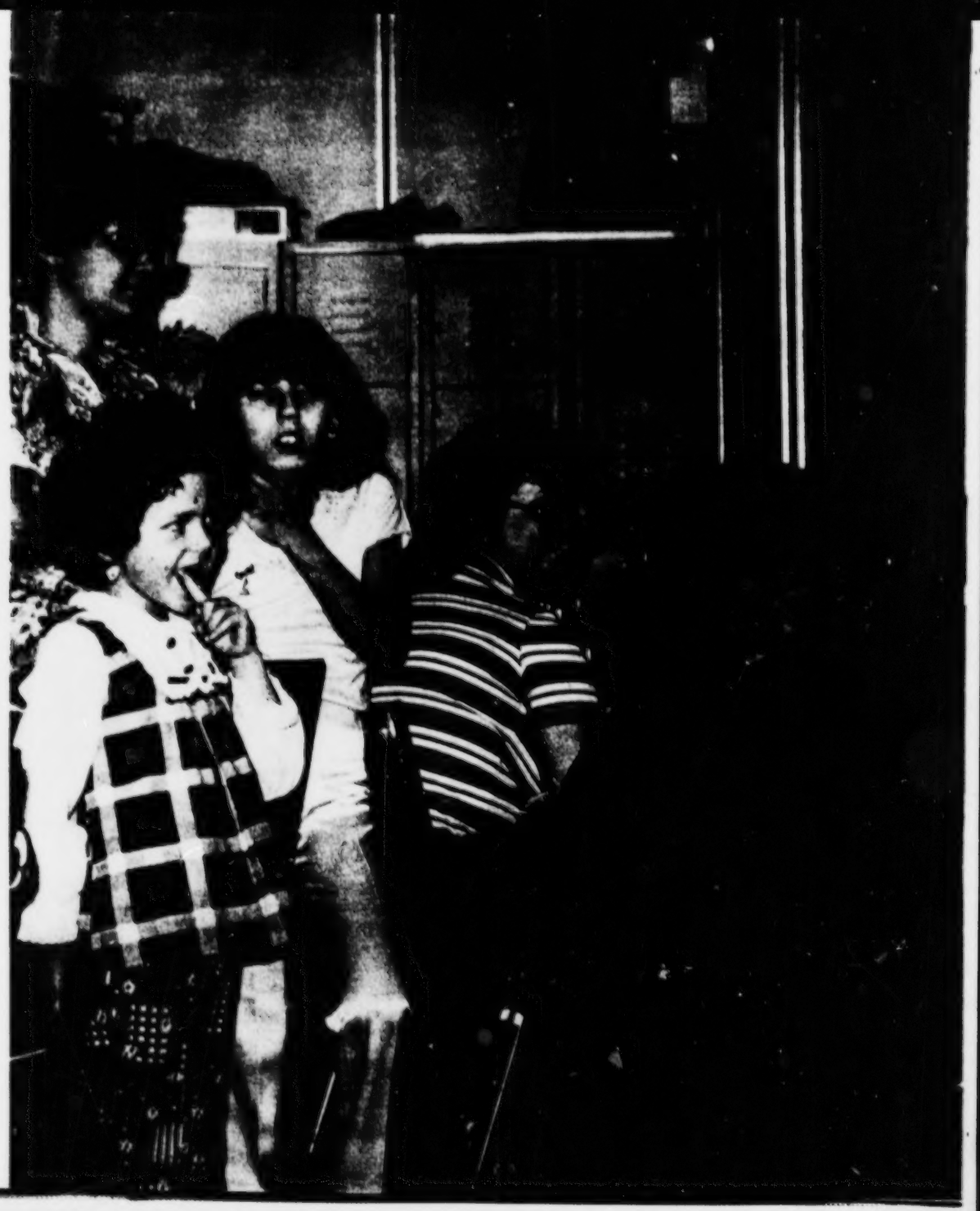
PARENTS' RIGHTS IN EDUCATION[8]

Parents have the right . . .

1. To be recognized as an important partner in the child's learning experience. Parents are the major factor in the child's learning experience from birth 'til school entry.
2. To be treated courteously by school personnel. Parents should be able to see the principal, the guidance counsellor, and the classroom teacher without too much delay and red tape. And they should meet as equals.
3. To know about academic requirements. Schools should inform parents about the program of study their child is pursuing, and the aims and goals of particular subjects.
4. To have information about a child's progress. This includes the right to comprehensive parent-teacher conferences whenever required, and to get help for a child who is not doing well.
5. To contribute ideas and suggestions on school policies and procedures. As important partners in the learning process, parents' opinions should be valued, respected, listened to, and where applicable, acted upon.
6. To exercise their views collectively as well as individually, to organize and participate in whatever parental organization they wish.
7. To stay uninvolved. There will always be some parents who believe that what happens in school is between the school and the child. These parents should be allowed their privacy and should not be scorned by the school. At the same time, such parents should not be used by the school as an excuse not to respect the rights that other parents wish to exercise.

Teachers and administrators at local schools must assume the responsibility for initiating and encouraging parental involvement.

National Committee for
Citizens in Education



Chapter 4

Policy-Making and Parental Involvement

INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers suggestions and guidelines to school trustees and administrators for implementing policies regarding parental involvement in school divisions.

The questions at the end of each exercise are meant to provoke discussion of how your board might respond to the issues at the heart of the involvement in the school system by Indian and Metis parents.

Your staff or board should set aside some time for group discussions of the topics in this chapter. The aim is to help you to formulate policies that when implemented, will increase the involvement in the school of the parents in your school division.

I BELIEVE . . .[1]

Answer the quiz below. Underline the T (true) or F (false) in front of each statement according to whether you believe the statement to be true or false.

The correct answers are printed below.

1. T F Parent involvement is necessary in education because most parents lack knowledge about their children.

2. T F A truly meaningful parent involvement program utilizes parents to help with the clerical tasks but allows the decision-making process to remain in the hands of the professionals.

3. T F A major problem that often confronts those people who plan parent involvement programs is that some parents feel uncomfortable and unwanted with regards to the school setting.

4. T F Parental involvement in the decision making process of the board inevitably creates confusion and impedes progress.

5. T F It is possible to have effective involvement by Indian and Metis parents even though the parents may not agree on every school related issue.

6. T F Although evaluation is an important part of the teaching process, it is not a major part of conducting effective parent involvement programs.

7. T F Parent involvement programs should be planned by those parents and teachers who are highly educated.

8. T F The main reason many parent involvement programs falter is that parents of young children are not interested in becoming involved in evening activities at the school.

9. T F Parent involvement programs should have the effect of improving the self concepts of teachers, parents, and children.

10. T F A constructive parent involvement practice is to encourage parents to attend board meetings.

Answer Key:
1 = F, 2 = F, 3 = T, 4 = F, 5 = T, 6 = F, 7 = F, 8 = F, 9 = T, 10 = T

EXERCISE 1

SETTLING DISPUTES

Read the following articles and discuss with your colleagues your answers to the questions which follow:

Parents Picket Over Teacher Dismissal[2]

PRINCE ALBERT DAILY HERALD

A number of irate parents from Southend are expected to demonstrate this afternoon at the Northern Lights School Division offices, demanding that a fourth teacher be hired for the school, 180 kilometres northeast of La Ronge.

In a telephone interview this morning, Town Councillor Bella Dumais said protesters will include councillors, the mayor, parents, and school children.

She said parents are upset because the present staff of three leaves the school with only two teachers and a principal for the 64 students in Kindergarten to Grade 9.

Dumais said when it became known there would be a staff reduction, parents pulled their children out of school in the last week of June in protest.

At the meeting on Wednesday held outside the school, parents were told the staff reduction at Southend and 17 other northern communities was necessary because there wasn't any money in the province, and if the school division relented, there would be protests in 16 other communities, Dumais related. "Our community is the only one that fought back."

However, Northern Lights superintendent Tony Kustiak says the staff reduction is in keeping with the pupil-teacher ratio policy that is practiced by other school boards.

He points out the division does not include six kindergarten pupils in the ratio, which this year with three teachers will work out to 20:1. Prior to the staff reduction, the ratio was 16:1.

Staff reductions are looked at school by school, influenced in part by non-growth areas, Kustiak explained. "It's a matter of economics . . ."

School Issue Over, Everybody Wins[3]

PRINCE ALBERT DAILY HERALD

Both the Northern Lights School Division and Southend parents seemed to emerge winners Thursday after four hours of discussion.

A handful of parents, councillors and the mayor of the small community located 180 kilometres northeast of La Ronge and Northern Lights, reached a compromise on having a fourth teacher for the school's 64 students.

Under the agreement there will be a fourth teacher. But, the school will no longer comprise only Kindergarten to Grade 9. Students who went to La Ronge for Grade 10 will now attend school at Southend.

"We're quite happy with that," said William Dumais, a member of the local school advisory board, noting parents are also pleased with the compromise.

Neither threat was carried out.

Bargaining was quite hard, said Dumais, but both sides gave a little and took a little.

In addition to providing a fourth teacher once again, Northern Lights will also supply a home and school coordinator, he said.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What channels do parents have to make their grievances known to the board? Are these channels adequate?
2. Should parents be consulted on such matters as staff reduction and pupil-teacher ratio? Why or why not?
3. What are some steps your board can take to reduce the potential of confrontation between parents and trustees/staff?
4. What are some of the most common complaints you receive from parents?

EXERCISE 2

WHAT KIND OF SCHOOL PROGRAM DO INDIAN AND METIS PARENTS WANT FOR THEIR CHILDREN?[4]

Read the following article and discuss the questions which follow. (Suggestion: make the topic of this article an agenda item for your next board or staff meeting. Devote 45 minutes of the meeting to a discussion of the article and the questions which follow.)

Most programs designed for Indian and Metis students have placed an undue emphasis on "culture." In this article, *Kogila Moodley* suggests that most Indian and Metis parents and indeed other minority group parents, would rather see schools place more emphasis on academic competence and less on the cultural components.

School personnel should therefore revise the curriculum to deal with this fact without perpetuating the Eurocentric bias of most curricula.

On the whole competence, not culture, is the major concern of Indian and Metis and other minority group parents. While these are not mutually exclusive, it is foremost the mastery of modern as well as the retention of functional aspects of their own traditional knowledge to which they most aspire.

What most Indian and Metis parents want for their children is not condescending teaching of fragmented, diluted versions of their culture, taught second hand by a non-authentic group member. They expect committed, demanding teaching aimed at mastery of the basic skills that are required to survive and succeed in this society.

An example of this phenomenon is a B.C. school which established an enrichment program for Native Indian pupils. They were removed from regular classes to read from books containing Native stories and illustrated entirely with Native peoples' pictures. In addition, twice a week older Native community persons were invited to teach beadwork and net-mending.

Several sympathetic teachers felt that the children who needed most attention were being shortchanged by a well-intentioned effort. Such an instance shows all too clearly how unreal and ineffective such idealized conceptions of Native culture can turn out. While such efforts may increase greater self-respect toward a forgotten heritage in the short run, dysfunctional cultural survival strategies shortchange students' opportunities in the long run.

Cultural content in the school curriculum should take second place to other forces which stand in the way of academic achievement. The most successful communities are those which have taken cultural and religious education into their hands while entrusting public schools with the training for the marketplace.

What does this leave for school divisions to do with the curriculum? It does not preclude information and awareness of the cultural backgrounds of pupils, to better diagnose strengths and weaknesses, as well as differences in cognitive styles. It assumes provision for learning of heritage languages for all students who so choose. It still calls for active anti-racism awareness, examining teacher expectations, stereotyping and bias in school materials. It also calls for an appreciation of diversity in the curricula material which must be integrated thematically in a global perspective and not as an end in itself.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What percentage of Indian and Metis parents in your school division feel that your board is doing the best job possible to educate their youngsters?
2. Does your board actively solicit from parents of different races their views on education? If yes, how could this practice be improved? If no, why not?
3. How much money does your board allocate to programs that deal directly with improving: (a) race relations, (b) parental participation, (c) anti-racist education, (d) the academic standards of minority students, in your school division.

EXERCISE 3

INDIAN AND METIS ADVISORY COUNCILS/COMMITTEES[5]

Establish a committee of two or three persons to review the following guidelines for effective advisory councils/committees. If you decide to establish such councils you will need a method to go about doing so. Give the committee specific terms of reference and a date on which to present its findings to the board or staff.

One effective form of Indian and Metis parental involvement is the establishment of advisory councils/committees. Indian/Metis advisory councils/committees can play an important role in the guidance of school boards in policy making if the correct steps are taken toward their operation.

Here are a few guidelines to assist you in establishing advisory councils/committees or restructuring those that currently exist.

Role:

— Define and make explicit the group's role so that parents and administrators alike know what to expect.

— Parents, teachers, and administrators should be involved in defining the role or otherwise there is the risk that adversarial relationships may form. After an agreement is reached . . .

— Prepare a written statement for the advisory group. The written statement should define how much responsibility the advisory group will have in any decision area. (Advisory activities can take many forms ranging from making recommendations to actually making a binding decision.)

Involvement:

— Involve the advisory group in significant school-related areas and allow them to make important decisions. Some of these decisions should relate to curriculum, budget, personnel, and parent activities.

— Allow the group to contribute regularly to decisions on educational matters. The group should meet periodically to discuss issues and to make recommendations.

— Ensure that the group involvement has impact. There should be some feedback on how the group's advice has actually influenced decisions made by the board.

Training and Communication:

— Train the group members intensively. Well conceived training programs help participants (a) develop important skills, (b) imbue in members a sense of confidence in their role.

— Communicate frequently and honestly between the group, the school board, and the parents the group represents.

Support:

— Provide support services. These services are often essential in enabling the group to carry on business. Also, these services carry with them an implicit message that their activities are considered important to school boards.

Monitor and Evaluate:

— Encourage the chairperson to take stock of the group's operations, periodically, looking for ways of improving the nature and extent of participation in decision making.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Are there advisory councils/committees in your school division? What are they? If none exists, do you see the need for them? If so, which ones?
2. How could your school division benefit or is now benefitting from the existence of advisory councils/committees within the division?

WHOSE BRIGHT IDEA WAS THIS ANYWAY??

EXERCISE 4

SOLICITING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN CURRICULUM MAKING[6]

The following suggestions are important considerations to take into account when revisions are being made to the curriculum. Select any of the suggestions that are suitable to your board. Make an effort to have some of these measures implemented in future curriculum review projects that your board undertakes.

Ideally, curriculum reflects the cultural values of the community being served by the schools. Indian and Metis communities are not often properly represented in commercially-developed curriculum materials. For this reason, many school boards need to work closely with members of the Indian and Metis community to develop learning materials appropriate to Indian and Metis students and integrating it into schools.

To ensure proper development, the board and the community must identify and use appropriate mechanisms to make certain that the developed curriculum reflects the characteristics of the community and the educational needs of Indian and Metis students.

There are different ways to involve the community in curriculum development. Your board may use any number of these ways:

1. A good way to start is with a Needs Assessment. Go to the community to determine their needs and desires. You must first define your community, meet the representatives, and hold extensive discussions with the leadership.
2. Use the knowledge of the community members as additional resources for curriculum content.
3. Conduct an ongoing review of curriculum development. This can be done through a committee which meets regularly with staff, sets priorities for development, and reviews development. This committee should be representative of the community and also be accountable to the community.
4. Have the community sanction completed curriculum. If your community has an official body such as a Band Council or Advisory Council, they should be able to approve and officially recognize your products.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does your board presently work together with the community on curriculum related matters?
2. What policies besides curriculum do you think could be improved by increased parental input into the board's decision?
3. What mechanism does your board employ to eliminate from the curriculum the use of racist and sexist materials?

EXERCISE 5

EVALUATING YOUR PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM[7]

After you begin a parental involvement program, you will need to devise a means of assessing the program as a whole. Here are a few questions you could ask concerning its nature and impact.

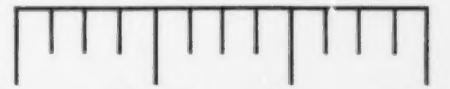
Appoint an "ad hoc" committee to compile a questionnaire suitable to your program. Use the questions in Part A below to generate your own list of questions about the program in general.

Use the sample Profile Worksheet as shown in the Appendix to assess a single aspect of your program — in this case advisory councils/committees. Similar profile worksheets may be constructed for other components of your parental involvement program. By studying the completed **Parent Involvement** profile worksheets, you will be able to determine which components of your program could stand some improvement. If you feel some components of your program need improvement, establish reasonable goals and objectives for each component. Secondly, identify the steps and tasks you will take to meet your goals. Thirdly, set target dates for completing your plan of action.

Part A: Parent Involvement Profile:

1. How many different school-support activities do you have during the school year?
2. What percentage of Indian and Metis parents participate in school-support activities?
3. Do you hold parent education sessions?
4. What percentage of Indian and Metis parents have participated in at least one parent education workshop?
5. What impact has the parent education program had according to parents?
6. What percentage of Indian and Metis parents have participated in at least one activity sponsored by the school?
7. What percentage of classrooms have at least one parent working as a paid or volunteer aide?
8. What percentage of parent aides collaborate with classroom teachers in planning instructional strategies for children?

   (Answer the following question using the continuum.)



9. What role does your advisory group play in decisions about curriculum or instructional services to be offered to Indian and Metis students?
10. What contribution has the parent involvement program made according to i) parents, ii) teachers.

CURRICULUM WORKSHOP

The following activities are descriptions of projects your school division may try in order to counteract the biases in instructional materials:

OBJECTIVES:
- To promote an awareness of biases in curriculum materials.
- To assist parents and teachers with their evaluation of curriculum material for racial and sexist biases.
- To assist parents in planning appropriate responses to negatively biased materials.

MATERIAL/PERSONNEL:
Guest Speaker/workshop leader.

BUDGET: Honorarium for guest speaker.

TIME: One two-hour workshop, twice per year.

STRATEGY:
- Invite a guest speaker to conduct a workshop/seminar on the topic of racist and sexist biases and the curriculum. Be sure to select a time convenient for most parents.
- Select a theme to suit the objectives above.
- The workshop should allow a maximum participation by all in attendance.

EVALUATION:
Verbal or written responses of parents and teachers at the end of the workshop.

CULTURE-FAIR BOOK FESTIVAL

OBJECTIVES:
- To promote the distribution of non-racist and non-sexist books in schools.
- To encourage parents and students to read a wide selection of books.

MATERIALS: Posters, letters of invitation.

PERSONNEL:
A Saskatchewan writer; four or five representatives of various publishing firms.

BUDGET: No additional money.

TIME: Once per year.

STRATEGY:
- Invite representatives of four or five publishing firms and/or book stores to participate in a one or two day book festival.
- Select a theme for the festival related to the objectives of this activity. Be sure to advise the representatives to display books that support the theme of the festival.
- Invite parents and students to attend the festival and purchase books.
- Invite a local writer to declare the festival open.

EVALUATION:
Count the number of parents and students who attend. Get a tally of the number and cost of books sold.

GET ON BOARD

The discussions throughout this handbook sought to engage parents in the social, academic, administrative and policy issues of the school. The benefits to school of such an extensive degree of involvement are numerous. Yet the steps to achieve these results require a vast amount of time and effort. Results take time; time for ideas to germinate, time to build communication bridges, time for habits to change. The exercises in the handbook are meant to illustrate ways of initiating this process of change.

Although the school may make the overture in the beginning stages of a parental participation program, the idea of an equal "partnership" of parents and teachers must be intrinsic to any working relationship. As parents assume more responsibilities and gain confidence in their own roles, the more this relationship will mature. Teachers and principals need not view parent involvement as a threat to their jurisdiction or an abdication of their powers. As long as both sides adhere to the current legal definitions of their own rights and powers, jurisdictional conflicts need not arise.

As parents from all walks of life take a greater interest in shaping the direction of school, new challenges and greater accountability are being demanded of schools. There seems to be no better time to invite on board every player who is committed to get the job done. It is in this spirit that this handbook was conceived and written.

Appendix

PROFILE WORKSHEET: INVOLVING PARENTS IN ADVISORY GROUPS[1]

Three criteria for judging the successful involvement of an advisory group in the school are presented below.

1. The parent advisory group gets involved in significant school-related areas. A parent advisory group ought to participate in making important decisions. One study showed that the most active groups helped make decisions about: (1) curriculum, or what instructional services are offered to students; (2) the budget, or how funds are allocated; (3) personnel, or who provides educational services to students; and (4) parent activities, or how parents are to participate in schools.
2. This involvement occurs regularly. The parent advisory group contributes regularly to decisions on educational matters. For example, a one-time screening of paid-aide applications is not considered successful involvement. A group should be meeting periodically to discuss issues and to make recommendations to decision makers.
3. This involvement has impact. Parent advisory group recommendations are listened to and, on occasion, lead to action. In other words, there should be some evidence that the group's advice has successfully influenced decisions may by division or school staff.

Judging the Status of Your Parent Advisory Group

The questions that follow are based on these three criteria and ask you to judge the role that your advisory group plays in each of the four decision areas listed in the first criterion.

When answering each question, think about the major decisions that have been made in the school or division over the past year. Then decide how you would describe your advisory group's role in most of those decisions. Use these definitions to help decide where you would place your advisory group on a continuum from "no involvement" to "major involvement" in school or division decisions.

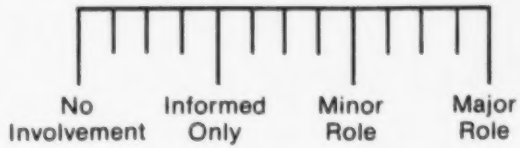
NO INVOLVEMENT — The advisory group was not even informed about activities in a given area and was never asked to advise on any decisions that were made in that area.

INFORMED ONLY — The advisory group was kept informed about activities in the area, but was not asked for any advice.

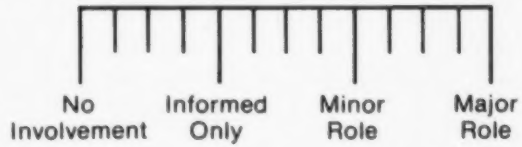
MINOR ROLE — The advisory group was "asked" for advice about decisions, but for the most part, it went along with staff recommendations with little discussion or advice being offered.

MAJOR ROLE — The advisory group gave advice that was regularly heeded by school or division decision makers. The group was an important part of the overall decision process.

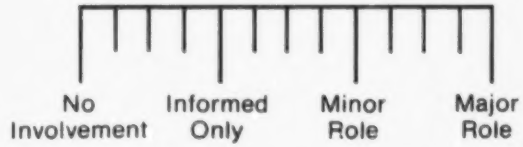
1. WHAT ROLE DOES YOUR ADVISORY GROUP PLAY IN DECISIONS ABOUT CURRICULUM OR INSTRUCTIONAL SERVICES TO BE OFFERED TO STUDENTS? (Role: Curriculum)



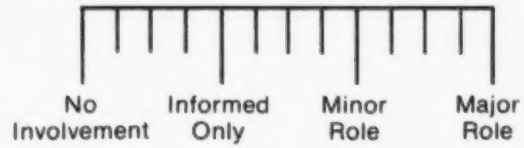
2. WHAT ROLE DOES YOUR ADVISORY GROUP PLAY IN DECISIONS ABOUT THE BUDGET OR HOW MONEY WILL BE SPENT (OTHER THAN ITS OWN BUDGET)? (Role: Budget)



3. WHAT ROLE DOES YOUR ADVISORY GROUP PLAY IN DECISIONS ABOUT PERSONNEL? (Role: Personnel)



4. WHAT ROLE DOES YOUR ADVISORY GROUP PLAY IN DECISIONS ABOUT PARENT ACTIVITIES? (Role: Parent Activities)



REQUESTING A CONFERENCE WITH A TEACHER[2]

Sample Letter

The following is a model letter parents may use to write to school. Remind them to always keep a copy of such a letter for themselves.

Date: _____

Teacher's Name: _____

School: _____

Address: _____

City, Province, Postal Code: _____

Dear

My son/daughter, _____, is in your grade three class. I would like very much to meet with you next week to discuss his/her progress in school. At that time, I would like to see samples of his/her work in class, his/her test scores, grades, and any other materials which you feel are pertinent.

I will be happy to meet with you after school any day next week at your convenience.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,

(Sign name)

Return Address
Telephone Number

Glossary

Advisory Committee
An organized group typically made up of school staff, parents, community representatives, and sometimes students, established to advise a school's staff or school board regarding education concerns.

Basal Reader
A book that is used to teach reading. It begins with skills that are simple for the youngster and gradually builds to harder skills. Basal readers contain stories written at the grade level of the child.

Cross-Cultural
A program of study or method of teaching that utilizes information and/or approaches from more than one culture.

Culture
Totality of ideas, beliefs, values, knowledge of a group of individuals who share certain historical experiences. Culture is dynamic and often contains elements of conflict and opposition.

Curriculum
This is a plan of what to teach in a class. It includes an outline of knowledge, skills and values to be taught during the school year and methods for teaching this information. There is a separate curriculum written for each subject in each grade level.

Discrimination
The granting and/or denying of certain rights to certain groups. This behaviour results in minorities being maltreated or excluded.

Ethnic Group
A group of people who have lived together as a single cultural group for many generations and who have an identifiable combination of beliefs, language, religion, territory of national origin, customs, and history in common.

Minority
A group with a certain set of characteristics which set it apart from the dominant group in a society — the group is usually aware of itself as having a depressed status relative to the majority and may be subjected to unequal and differential treatment. This group may be a numerical majority in world terms or even community terms.

Nationality
A person's citizenship. Nationality is a political definition; it should not be used as a cultural group definition.

Race
The physical features — skin colour, stature, head shape and hair type — that characterize a group of people. Persons of a certain race may vary individually, but they are characterized as a group by a combination of measurable features which have been derived from a common ancestor.

Remedial Instruction
A specialized type of teaching for a child who is having trouble with reading, writing, language, or any subject area.

Teacher Aide
An assistant to a teacher (either a parent, student, or paid assistant) who assists in a classroom instructional program.

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APPENDIX:

1. Adapted from: **Involving Parents,** by Peggy Lyon et. al., High Scope Press, 1983.
2. Reprinted from: **Education for All People,** by Ronald Walker and June de Groot. Institute of Responsive Education, 1983.

Partners At School

From The Reviews

"The handbook is an excellent idea. It outlines a number of new initiatives we will certainly be trying."

D. Rutten, Principal — St. Mary School, Saskatoon

"Congratulations on a worthwhile endeavour . . ."

Wayne Fehr, Principal — Stobart Elementary School, Duck Lake

"The handbook has much potential. The suggested activities could and would do much to involve parents in the education of their children."

J. A. Volk, Executive Director — Saskatchewan School Trustees Association

"I think the handbook would be very useful with staff . . . it's very open ended."

Mike Fulton, Director — Indian Head School Division No. 19

"Partners at School represents a vigorous treatment of (ways) to involve parents . . . could be used by a school division for involvement by any parent group."

Wayne King, Director — Turtleford School Division No. 65

"Congratulations to the committee on this worthwhile project."

T. Fortin, Director of Education
— Prince Albert Roman Catholic Separate School Division No. 6

"The increased participation of Indian and Metis people in the education of their children must be an important goal for all educators. This handbook provides practical ways to reach that goal."

Lawrie McFarlane, Deputy Minister — Saskatchewan Education

"This handbook, accompanied by additional information about the school division, would be useful in northern Saskatchewan."

Rick Laliberte, Trustee — Northern Lights School Division No. 113